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AUTHOR Smith, Alfred N.
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ABSTRACT

This article illustrates how the scenario framework in the 1996 publication "Standards for Foreign Language Learning" can direct the production of a standards-based thematic unit on the family for a second year, first semester college level French course. The learning scenario in a standards document serves primarily as an illustrative tool highlighting classroom cases that shows how standards have been implemented. The thematic unit provides an integrated approach to teaching and learning because it brings content to the language lesson and connects the four skills in more meaning-based, communicative ways. The choice of themes and related ideas should be based on student interest and what is age appropriate. Authentic materials from the target language countries that convey information about the theme topic link the language class to the outside world. The activities in thematic units are task-based, relevant, personalized, and accomplished in cooperative settings. An example of a thematic unit, one designed to coordinate with a chapter on the family in a college-level French textbook, is detailed and included in this article. The targeted standards include the following: interpersonal communication; school and community; interpretive communication; presentational communication; language comparisons; cultural comparisons; and acquiring information. Scenario worksheets are included. (KFT)

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An ACTFL Issues Paper

Designing a Standards-Based Thematic Unit Using the Learning Scenario As an Organizing Framework

Alfred N. Smith, Utah State University

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An ACTFL Issues Paper

Designing a Standards-Based Thematic Unit Using the Learning Scenario As an Organizing Framework

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At the end of the publication *Standards for Foreign Language Learning: Preparing for the 21st Century* (1996) appear summaries of sample teaching and learning situations collected from language teachers whose schools participated as pilot sites during the development of the Standards. These brief synopses are called Learning Scenarios, and their purpose is to provide classroom examples of how the Standards have been incorporated into the foreign language curriculum of the participating districts.

These Learning Scenarios have the following parts: 1) a title which indicates the general content: "The Euro," "Attending a Bullfight," "Proverbs and Common Sayings"; 2) a description of language, level, and context of instruction (fourth grade Spanish class, second term); 3) a summary description of classroom activities which incorporate the selected Standards ("Students create and perform an amusing role play using proverbs that preach 'moderation'."); 4) a list of targeted Standards (1.3 Presentational Communication, 2.2 Products of Culture). Following the description of classroom activities, there is 5) a list of sample student behaviors related to the Scenario which illustrate how other curricular elements and goals are woven into the lesson. The curricular "weave," as this final part (5) is called, specifies the particular content of the Scenario, i.e. what is being taught and learned (grammar, vocabulary, culture, other subject matter areas) and how that content is received and processed by learners (communication strategies, cognitive operations, use of technology).

The Learning Scenario in the Standards document serves primarily as an illustrative tool highlighting classroom cases that shows how Standards have been implemented. Teachers and curriculum designers are also using the Learning Scenario as an organizing framework in the development of Standards-based lessons and units. It can serve as an initial outline and basic checklist to help in the formulation of goals and the planning of classroom activities. This article will illustrate how the scenario framework can direct the production of a Standards-based thematic unit on the family for a second-year, first semester college-level French course. The general outline of this process begins with the following description of a thematic unit.

Teachers in search of instructional approaches which facilitate the implementation of the Standards are incorporating more and more the thematic unit into their language curriculum. The thematic unit provides an integrated approach to teaching and learning because it brings content to the language lesson and connects the four skills in more meaning-based, communicative ways. For example, the traditional lesson on the family (themeless and devoid of significant content) presents kinship terms which students practice as they talk and/or write about their families (often limited to names and numbers of relatives: "How many brothers and sisters do you have?" "What is your sister's name?" "How old is she?"). In contrast, a possible thematic unit on the family would connect the learning of kinship terms to a central idea, such as how family values have changed in a generation's time. In this unit, students might read articles about gender roles in modern marriages and conduct surveys among their peers or family members to determine attitudes about women keeping their maiden names or marrying across cultures and religions. Students could write what they think would be a meaningful marriage ceremony or create a skit in which parents discuss their preferred ways of child rearing. Students would learn a more extensive vocabulary including terms used to identify members of blended families: step-mother, half-brother, or single-parent family.

The choice of themes and related ideas should be determined by student interest and what is age appropriate. For example, at the university level the challenges of being a single or divorced parent or of living together before marriage would be topics of greater interest in the family-values unit than how brothers and sisters help their parents with chores around the house, a topic more appropriate for middle school students.

Authentic materials from target language countries which convey information about the theme topic link the language class to the outside world. In the family thematic unit students could search the Internet for information about the percentage of working mothers in the

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modern family of L2 cultures. "Real-world" audio, video and printed documents should provide a basis for comparing family values across cultures.

The activities in thematic units are task-based, relevant, personalized and accomplished in cooperative settings.The thematic unit, when properly developed, becomes a source of many integrated communicative activities which promote the attainment of the five goals by integrating as many of the eleven Standards into the daily lessons as possible.

The thematic unit described below has been designed to coordinate with a chapter on the family in a college-level French textbook (Chapter 13, *Deux Mondes*); it uses the Learning Scenario framework as a point of departure. The class selected a theme around which to focus the content about the family: "Changing Family Values." To begin the Scenario, the first two parts (title and description of language level and context of instruction), were already in place:

1. Title: "Changing Family Values"

2. Language Level and Context of Instruction. University students (from 18 to 25 years old) in their first semester of the second-year intermediate French sequence, some with 2 to 3 years of previous high school language study will examine the modern family and changes in values and attitudes across cultures. Some of the students are married with children, one is divorced, most live in apartments or dorms with roommates or significant others, and a few are still living at home with parents.

Within this Learning Scenario there are ample opportunities for incorporating all three Standards of the Communications goal. The teacher could introduce the unit by bringing in pictures of family members and talking (in the target language) about the different relationships he/she has with the children and grandchildren and the differences in their life priorities and their life styles as compared to the parents. Students present their families similarly. Students could conduct surveys to determine differences in values among various family members. There would be opportunities to deal with the first Standard of the Cultures goal, since the class would be looking at the American "practice" of leaving the nest in the late teens and early twenties (or returning to the nest because of financial or marital difficulties) and examining attitudes ("perspectives") of the young adults and their parents concerning these practices. Since students would be acquiring demographic information about the modern family in France and America through authentic video, newspapers and native informants, the second Standard of the Connections goal would be treated. The unit would certainly provide comparisons about aspects of language and culture akin to the theme topic, so both Standards of the Comparisons goal would receive attention. Out-of-class interviews with other Francophone students were planned. Guest visits were arranged with a professor in sociology who speaks French and is knowledgeable about family issues in France and with a Venezuelan language teacher (former French major) who could talk in French about families in her country .

To keep all of these ideas in mind, the teacher needs to write out each part of the scenario. The third part which describes the main activities in the unit would look like this:

3. Summary Description of Classroom Activities The teacher will model a presentation of his/her own family with photos. This talk will include comments about the nature of relationships with parents, children, and grandchildren and compare the differences in life priorities and styles across generations. Students in the class will present their families similarly. Through in-class and out-of-class surveys, students will explore family values and determine the differences in attitudes among the parents, grandparents, and their adult children. They will research articles from the media on family values and present the main points to their classmates. Guest speakers, a sociology professor and a Venezuelan language teacher, will discuss family values in terms of their research and personal backgrounds.

The next step is to outline ideas for in-class and out-of class activities that would relate to the Standards in the unit. For some of the Standards there are samples of exercises (in French, but translated into English for this article) provided that were eventually developed and used in the unit. The following are the selected Standard clusters (Several Standards are often targeted in a single project or activity) with a summary of possible teaching/learning activities:

4. List of Targeted Standards. 1.1 Interpersonal Communication, 5.1 School and Community - Students will survey (Communications 1.1) their classmates, their parents, and advanced students and native speakers outside of class (Communities 5.1) to discover their attitudes and reactions to various situations: marriage with someone from another culture or religion, or older women marrying younger men. For one of the survey activities, students are given an interview sheet with the name and telephone number of a contact person (advanced students and native speakers who have agreed to be interviewed by the students in this class).
(See example of interview sheet on page 12).

1.2 Interpretive Communication - As the teacher makes the presentation about his family, an outline (in French) is distributed of what the teacher says with blanks where students write their notes about key points they identify as they listen (Communications 1.2) (see Figure 1 on page 12).

1.1 Interpersonal Communication, 1.2 Interpretive Communication, and 1.3 Presentational Communication, and 5.1 School and Community - The class will watch a video about a single parent in France whose daughter helped her to overcome her problem with alcohol. The video shows the mother and daughter receiving emotional and psychological support from various groups and social agencies in their French city

(Communications 1.2). There will be a discussion about how families in trouble in Logan, UT, and the United States find help. (Communications 1.1) This discussion will lead to an investigation (through telephone calls and visits) of family services in the region (Communities 5.1) and a report to the class (in French) on the services (Communications 1.3).

1.1 Interpersonal Communication, 1.2 Interpretive Communication, 1.3 Presentational Communication and 3.2 Acquiring Information - Students will acquire information on family values in France available only through the Internet and French newspaper and magazine articles (Connections 3.2). In groups, students search for articles dealing with an assigned topic (for example, divorce, house husbands) whose main points they will present and analyze to the class (Communications 1.3). Each group will conduct a discussion to determine classmates' attitudes and experiences with their topic and to explore possible solutions to problems (Communications 1.1). Students take notes on each group's presentation to write a summary (Communications 1.2).
An example of a group activity that resulted in furthering the presentational communications goal (1.3): One of the groups read an article about a "house husband." As part of their discussion with the class, they decided to put students in small groups to create the following role-plays:

1. Make up a conversation between a man who wants to become a "house husband" and his fiancee who does not agree.
2. Imagine a conversation about what the perfect marriage should be like between an engaged couple.
3. An engaged couple discusses what will be in their marriage vows that they plan to write themselves.

2.1 Practices of Culture, 3.1 Making Connections, and 4.2 Culture Comparisons- Guest speakers will be invited to speak on family issues. A professor in sociology who speaks French will present demographics on the modern French family (Connections 3.1) and will make comparisons with families in the United States (Comparisons 4.2). A Venezuelan language teacher (a former French major who teaches French in a nearby school) will talk (in French) about families in her country. She will be asked to compare the practice of "leaving the nest" as a sign of independence and self-reliance (perspectives - values) in America with the practice of "staying in the nest," which emphasizes the values of interdependence and family allegiance in many of the cultures she knows (Cultures 2.1). On the day before the visits, students will work in groups to formulate questions which they want to ask.
Here are some of the questions (in French) that students formulated before the sociologist's visit:

1. What are the biggest changes in the French family since the end of the last century?
2. Is the divorce rate in France as high as it is in the United States? If not, to what do you attribute the lower rate?
3. Are there as many blended and single parent families in France as in the United States?
4. What is the size of the average family in France?
5. How long do children live with their parents?
6. Is it common for young people to live together before they marry?

4.1 Language Comparisons - Students will study extended kinship vocabulary and will make the following comparisons: 1) the word grand (grand) can only be used with parent (parent), père (father) mère (mother), tante (aunt), or oncle (uncle) in French. Unlike English, which uses the word "grand" also before the terms child, son, daughter, niece, and nephew, in French, the word petit is used: petit-fils (grandson), petite-fille (granddaughter). In French the terms "in-law" and "step" are expressed by using the same word (beau/belle), whereas in English there is a distinction: beau-frère (step-brother) and beau-frère (brother-in-law). Students write a paragraph about their extended family using these new terms.

5. Curricular Weave - Student behaviors related to the Scenario illustrating how other curricular elements and goals are woven into the lesson include:

1. The language system - Students review and practice, in the context of the family, the third person object pronouns. In the surveys and group and pair work, most questions using direct and indirect objects should be answered using appropriate pronouns: Q: When your parents get old, will you be patient and listen to them when they tell the same story over and over again? A: I'll let them tell their stories, but I probably won't really listen to them.
2. Communication strategies - Students conduct surveys, and ask guest speakers questions. They negotiate for meaning and understanding during these exchanges. They will ask for clarifications, repetitions, examples when communication breaks down.
3. Critical thinking skills - Students will compare their values with those of other family members and acquaintances. They will identify some of the main problems with the modern family and analyze causes and propose solutions.

The final Scenario with all its parts is summarized below. It is a short document of less than one page to which the teacher can continually refer while constructing the thematic unit.

Changing Family Values
University students in their first semester of the second-year intermediate French sequence will examine the modern family and changes in values and attitudes across cultures.The teacher will begin with a model presentation of his/her own family using photos.The talk will include comments about the nature of relationships with parents, children, and grandchildren and compare

the differences in life priorities and styles across generations. Students in the class will present their families similarly. Through in class and out of class surveys students will explore family values and determine the differences in attitudes among the parents, grandparents, and their adult children. They will research articles from the media on family values and present the main points to their classmates. Guest speakers, a sociology professor and a Venezuelan language teacher, will discuss family values in terms of their research and personal backgrounds.

Targeted Standards:

1.1 Interpersonal Communication
1.2 Interpretive Communication
1.3 Presentational Communication
2.1 Practices of Culture
3.1 Making Connections
3.2 Acquiring Information
4.1 Language Comparisons
4.2 Culture Comparisons
5.1 School and Community

The Curricular Weave:

1. Students review and practice, in the context of the family, the third person object pronouns.
2. Students negotiate for meaning and understanding during exchanges with classmates, guest speakers and other francophone students.
3. Students will compare their values with those of other family members and acquaintances. They will identify some of the main problems with the modern family and analyze causes and propose solutions.

The Learning Scenario is a helpful construct which provides an overview of lesson and unit topics and a summary of possible activities and projects that the teacher hopes to implement. Its most important feature is the list of targeted Standards which keep teachers, as they build their language programs, focused on ways to integrate the five Cs into their daily instructional plans.

REFERENCES

Standards for Foreign Language Learning: Preparing for the 21st Century. 1996. Allen Press, Inc.: Lawrence, KS.

Figure 1

Interview your contact person to find out if s/he thinks the following situations are acceptable or unacceptable. (Model question: In your opinion, is it acceptable for a woman to marry and keep her maiden name?) Compare your opinions with those of the person you interviewed.

Example of a part of the presentation sheet which students use to note key points in the talk the teacher makes about his/her family (with photographs):

Al Smith was born _____

He has a brother, a physics teacher, who works_____

His only sister died in _____ when she _____

His parents had a long marriage which lasted _____until his father's recent death. His mother, a very independent person, is_____. Although she is very liberal, she doesn't like Al's beard and pony tail, because _____but she is proud of him because_____. On matters concerning _____, they agree.

Figure 2

Activity:

Contact this person:_____

Tel: _____

	Opinions of the person interviewed		My opinions	
	unacceptable	unacceptable	unacceptable	unacceptable
1. a woman marries and keeps her maiden name.				
2. a 52 year-old woman marries a 25 year-old man.				
3. a single person who loves children, but does not want to marry, adopts a child.				
4. a husband stays home while his wife works.				